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AUTHOR Carol, Lila N.
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ABSTRACT

Leadership/administrator training programs require a base that defines and explains clearly the variables that affect the structure and functioning of schools and the roles and behaviors of their leaders. Such programs need materials, support tools, and basic information on recruitment, selection, and preparation which a combination of research, practice, and evaluation indicate as the most profitable approaches to effective administrator performance. (Author)

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THE NEED FOR COLLABORATIVE INVESTMENTS IN EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

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Lila N. Carol
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The Need for Collaborative Investments
In Effective Administrator Preparation Programs

One of the central issues in educational administration concerns improving the preparation of educational leaders. There is little evidence to indicate the use of existing knowledge has resulted from research. There are also great gaps in the knowledge base that is needed to develop effective training programs. This symposium is geared toward increasing the understanding of potential participants in the development of preparation programs of the necessity and value of engaging in more systematic collaboration between researcher, developer, evaluator and school administrator.

Our subject is not new. The issue of closing the gap -- or at the very least -- of narrowing the gap between research and practice has been written about and discussed extensively.

It should be noted that the National Institute of Education was created by Congress to coordinate and support educational research and development, to bridge the gap between scholar and practitioner, an abyss widened by the structure of our educational system and by the complexities of the task.

Too frequently, the scholar and developer feel that the administrator and teacher do not pay attention to or use research findings. So too, the practitioners who do not feel that the results of research are are relevant to their tasks. Such perceptions and hence lack of use

have led to the increased isolation of the scholar from the reality of the schools, and the rejection by school people of good ideas from social science.[1]

Few of the people in this field have not been following the news of educational support by the Congress. You know that educational R&D budgets have been cut each year. Indeed, NIE has been threatened with extinction. The message, from Congress and other educationally oriented groups is that R&D must focus more seriously on producing information which can help the practitioner, and this should provide greater impetus for more integrated knowledge production and utilization efforts.[2]

The problem can be understood although not condoned in the context of the vast differences in perspective between the practitioners in the elementary and secondary schools and the academic researcher. What is more difficult to clarify is the problem as it exists between those institutions of higher learning who prepare educational administrators vis a vis researchers who often share the same campuses but not either their ideas or their findings.

The isolation of one group from the other is evident, the reasons less so, and the ommission is unforgiveable.

1 Thomas K. Glennan Jr., Strengthening the Link Between R&D and Practice: The Cornerstone of Education Reform, Speech at Learning Research & Development Center, Pittsburg, Pa., Feb. 1, 1974 (Mimeo).

2 Spencer Ward, Discussion in some informal conversations, Summer, 1974 at NIE.

Let us turn specifically to the educational administrator. To even the casual observer of the education scene, the embattled position of the schools has been known for more than a decade now. Competing demands have come from within and outside of the school -- from all possible quarters. Demands call for better teaching of basic skills to preparing people for life in the 21st century; from effectiveness and productivity to demands for shared decision-making; from equalizing educational opportunity to specialized programs for selected individuals.

The responsibility for sorting out competing demands and providing effective settings in which teaching and learning can take place rests for the most part with the educational administrator -- the superintendent, his deputies and the building principal.

For most of these administrators, training and experience have not provided significant or relevant resources to deal effectively in education's contemporary milieu. Would different training in their pre-service days or additional on-the-job training have increased their ability to cope with problems of power, acquisition and distribution of resources, the breadth of the school curriculum, specialized student needs, dealing with teachers, prioritizing needs and developing programs, managing complex organizations and communicating successfully with all manner of people? And at the same time, would they be able to make the orchestration of such activities result in positive outcomes for students?

My task, today, is to provide the overview, to set the context for some of the problems I see. Some of these issues will be taken up by other members of the panel this morning. You may want to raise others during the question and answer period during this symposium.

Since the 1960's there have been many modifications in the curriculum of administrator training insitutions, innumerable add-ons to inservice programs, the initiation of a handful of innovative programs. In 30 years, the number of institutions awarding degrees in educational administration has trebled. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of doctorates awarded in the field has doubled.[3] Yet today there is little evidence of an accompanying increase in quality or of the ability of administrators to manage their institutions any better, or to provide more responsive settings in which children can learn.

What do we know about leadership? We know that it involves a command of conceptual skills for seeing the organization as a whole and understanding the relationships of its various parts. Such skills are essential to the diagnosis of needs and analysis of how to implement solutions.

We know that leadership also involves technical skills needed to administer organizations successfully. These involve planning, management, and problem solving through group process and communication.

We know, too, that leadership requires human skills that encourage cooperative efforts, and which can be used to reduce conflict situations.

A combination of these attributes serves the administrator in his several roles: 1) as a maintainer of the school organization, 2) as a part of the larger organization from which resources must be acquired, and 3) as

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3 Stephen J. Knezevich, Doctorate Needs in Educational Administration During the 1970's and 1980's: A Preliminary Analysis, Special Report for University Council for Educational Administration, Columbus, Ohio, 1974.

an individual with personal goals, a leadership style, and his/her own image of American education.

For each quality and skill needed in the educational leader's repetoire, there are questions to be resolved on methods and techniques of providing such knowledge, and ensuring its recall and use in real world situations. But the greater problem -- or the more fundamental problem -- exists in our lack of knowledge and understanding of how educational organizations function in the context of a changing environment.

About eight months ago, a number of distinguished researchers came together under the sponsorship of NIE to examine organizational factors in education, and to suggest a research agenda. Chaired by James March, the group examined many areas in which research has not provided any, or sufficient, basic research which should serve as the knowledge base for improving schools and thus administrative functioning. [4]

I am borrowing rather freely and selectively from some of the initial discussion and first writings [5] in the following remarks and questions, in order to highlight the kind of information needed for effective leadership in our educational institutions.

First, there is a need by the administrator to understand the environment in which he/she labors. Today, this would include issues of retrenchment, changing distributions of power, changing expectations concerning the

4 James G. March, Organizational Factors in Education: Outline for A Program of Basic Research, Report to National Institute of Education, Stanford U. August 1974.

5 Radnor, et al, a draft monograph prepared for NIE in connection with a series of conferences on Institutional Effects, Summer 1974.

role of the school, in societal changes in values of students, parents, teachers, community. The issues of new structures for learning and new technologies, indeed, the very functions of the schools are important and legitimate grist for the mill of any aspiring leader/administrator. And here is one of the areas where we find knowledge gaps. We need research on administration in the real and very complex world in which it exists. How do organizations develop over time and adapt to their environments?

Second, the administrator needs to understand the general patterns of organizational behavior, but here too, there are many unresolved issues, even at the most generalized levels.

Third, what are the important variables needed to operate a school successfully? Who are the "members" of the school system? What are the variations in the key characteristics? Without a great deal more basic data about school systems, changes cannot be forecast, making it difficult, if not impossible, to plan intelligently on a level that calls for something above "tinkering".[6]

Fourth, school systems are increasingly adopting planning and evaluation systems, either because of the desire to utilize resources more efficiently, to rationalize their decisions, or because managment and accountability systems have been mandated by state legislatures. Many of these efforts are characterized by misunderstanding, frustration, inadequate technology.[7]

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6 Radnor, et al, Draft monograph for NIE.

7 Ibid.

Fifth, the whole elaborate spectrum of decision making is in a state of disarray. Even if this is viewed as an overstatement, there is considerable evidence to support the confusion that exists over who should make certain kinds of decisions and where they should be made and what technology should be employed.

Sixth, threaded through all of the previously mentioned issues and frequently highlighted are the various concepts of leadership. I will assume for our purposes today that a variety of definitions all have validity, and prefer at this time to concentrate on the criteria for measuring effective leadership, which in the final analysis should assess how effectively the organization operates.[8] An examination of the research on leadership produces much in the way of descriptive literature, but there is a paucity of empirically based prescriptive hypotheses.

This listing is merely suggestive and not exhaustive.

Emery and Trist's typology of the causal texture of organizational environments[9] might be employed to describe the world of educational organizations. The authors describe four environments:1) the placid random, 2) the placid clustered, 3) the disturbed reactive and 4) turbulent fields. It is to the latter that I attempt to relate the milieu in which educational organizations find themselves. In

8 Thomas W. Milburn, The Study of Leadership, draft paper,Mershon Center, Ohio State University, April 1974,pp. 1-3.

9 F.E.Emery and E.L.Trist,"The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments", from J.A.Litterer(Ed.)Organizations:Vol.II,Second Edition,Systems,Control and Adaption, New York,John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1963,PP.222-226.

turbulent fields, "dynamic processes...create significant variances for the component organizations". They arise, not from their own interaction as in Type 3 above, "but from the field itself". "The field, they say, " is in motion. Such environments require some relationship between dissimilar organizations whose fates are positively correlated."[10]

In other words, in a turbulent environment where conflict, competition and unpredictability rule, organizations tend to collaborate and therefore change their value systems to produce a more simplified environment. Much of this theory seems applicable to modifying educational environments through collaboration of institutions and agencies with differing responsibilities to similar clientele. The "return to a simplified environment" is a notion that the writer find as a noble objective, but in the case of public institutions where many similar systems are competing for the same resources , a goal that can never be realized.

Nevertheless, collaboration among the separate but relevant disciplines and agencies whose knowledge and experience can affect the educational institution, if it is focussed, if the perspectives are narrowed, can achieve solutions to persistent, and what appear to be now insoluble problems. I am not at all sanguine that the environment can be simplified; perhaps certain factors can be

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Emery and Trist, P.224.

brought under control or erradicated, but if we are to learn anything from the modern history of American education, we can be sure that as some issues are laid to rest, others will rise to take their places, or in the parlance of the race track announcer,"The field is in motion!"

The complicated problems that emerge from an incredible mosaic of actors, needs, demands and environments in the educational arena have roots which need to be unraveled and understood through the planned use of knowledge acquired from many places; some that may, at first blush, seem remote from educational administration. Nevertheless, a host of resources must be considered and appropriate selections made to bring together those whose knowledge and skills can improve the field. As examples, planned interfaces must be made between policy planners and management scientists, organizational theorists and social and behavioral researchers, economists, legal scholars, and administrative technologists.

Leadership/administrator training programs require a base which defines and explains clearly the variables that effect the structure and functioning of schools, and the roles and behaviors of their leaders. Such programs need materials, support tools, basic information on recruitment, selection and preparation which a combination of research, practice and evaluation indicate as the most profitable approaches to effective administrator performance.

Hopefully, this presentation has set the stage for the distinguished members of this symposium who will suggest some answers to the easy questions that have been posed in my remarks.

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